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Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/59, A/51/73, A/51/87, A/51/120, A/51/127, A/51/138, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/295, A/51/314, A/51/357, A/51/375, A/51/462-S/1996/831, A/51/529)

(e) HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (A/CONF.165/14, A/51/384)

1. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said he was pleased to see that the final document of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) had accorded equal importance to the two themes of the Conference, "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements development". Through that document, the international community had not only committed itself to long-term policies to improve the provision of shelter, but had also recognized its moral obligation to ensure that every person had a place to live. It had reaffirmed the right to adequate housing and recognized that such a right should be progressively but fully realized.

2. Habitat II had also stressed that the family, as the basic unit of society, had a vital role to play in the area of housing. The Holy See believed that respect, protection and assistance for families were vital components of any development programme. It was to their families that the poor naturally turned for assistance. The Habitat Agenda took up the concept of "an enabling approach" referred to in chapter 7 of Agenda 21. That concept was linked to the idea that markets served as the "primary housing delivery mechanism" in many countries. It was for the international community to place market forces at the disposal of the poor.

3. Real innovation was needed, and ways must be found of reconciling market forces with the social needs that the international community had committed itself to meeting. Governments had the obligation to assist the poor of their own countries. Not enough was being done to help the poor to benefit from economic growth. For example, more must be done to attract investment to the poorest areas, thereby promoting job creation. International markets must also be opened up to products from poor and underdeveloped areas. A document issued by the Holy See entitled "World Hunger, A Challenge for All: Development in Solidarity" stressed that importing countries must refrain from raising trade barriers to keep out exports from countries where a major proportion of the population was suffering from hunger. Companies must show greater corporate responsibility and use their economic influence to contribute to the economic and social development of the poorest areas. It must be recognized, however, that there would always be some people who, for a variety of reasons, were not able to benefit from free-market mechanisms. Their needs must also be met, and they must be provided with housing. There could be no development without peace: war destroyed housing and places of employment, and landmines rendered land unusable for agriculture and reduced villages to places where the poor and hungry simply sought shelter from the elements.

4. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements was a step in the right direction, but words must now be translated into action. Fulfilment of the

commitments made at Istanbul would contribute to improving the lives of the poor and would also show the international community's willingness to take action. As Pope John Paul II had stressed, ensuring suitable housing for everyone was a requirement of the respect owed to every human being and was therefore a measure of civilization and the condition for a peaceful, fraternal society.

5. Mr. ANDREASSEN (Norway) said he regretted that the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/384) did not give more prominence to certain issues debated at the Istanbul Conference that were included in the Habitat Agenda, such as the responsibility of Governments to facilitate participation of vulnerable groups at the local level, the need to integrate gender perspectives in policies and plans at all levels, and focusing greater attention on the role of women, the needs of children and disabled people and the role of indigenous peoples.

6. Habitat II had raised awareness of the importance of human settlements issues. That momentum must now be maintained. Implementation and follow-up of the Habitat Agenda should be discussed in both the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Settlements. National and local authorities had the primary responsibility for facilitating the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Habitat Agenda at the local level. The fact that representatives of civil society had participated in the Conference reflected the increasingly close partnership between civil society and Governments. That collaboration must also exist at the local level. Governments must facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups and recognize the important role of women at the grass-roots level. To that end, the Government of Norway would be helping to finance the establishment of women's networks at the grass-roots level in Africa. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) would be responsible for planning and execution of that project, which could serve as a model for application in other regions.

7. His Government attached great importance to the central issue of patterns of consumption and production. Since the 1993 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Norway had given that issue special attention in the context of following up and implementing the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. A symposium and a ministerial round table on the question had been held in Oslo.

8. With regard to the paragraphs in the Habitat Agenda dealing with institutional questions, his delegation stressed the need to establish an institutional framework within the United Nations for consideration of those questions. That matter should, however, be considered in the overall context of the reform of various United Nations bodies.

9. Mr. Kyul-Ho KWAK (Republic of Korea) noted that the world's population had doubled in 40 years, during which time its urban population had tripled. Almost 50 per cent of the population now lived in cities and 1 billion of them lacked adequate shelter. By the year 2025, about 75 per cent of the earth's population would live and work in urban areas.

10. The surge in the urban population had exacerbated existing problems such as poverty, inequality, particularly inequality between the sexes, crime and violence, and had created new problems such as environmental degradation. There

was thus a pressing need to enhance international cooperation so that the quality of human settlements could be improved.

11. While the challenges of human settlements were a global problem, the specific problems varied from country to country. It was important to take account of the political, economic, social and cultural situation of each country and community. Governments alone, however, could not overcome the social and environmental difficulties facing urban societies. They needed to cooperate with organizations in civil society, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and local authorities in order to create sustainable human settlements.

12. It was also important to increase regional, subregional and international cooperation in the areas of finance and the transfer of technology. In that regard, the United Nations system, and in particular the Commission on Human Settlements and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, should support Governments and the international community. The Habitat Agenda set out principles for action that should be applied at the national and international levels. It was essential to monitor and assess the results of its implementation regularly. The Republic of Korea believed that due attention should be given to the issue of human settlements at the special session to be convened for an overall review and appraisal of Agenda 21, and considered that the Habitat Agenda should also be appraised in the year 2001, five years after the Istanbul Conference.

13. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements) said that the secretariat of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) would be available to Member States and other partners to ensure that the issue of human settlements was considered at the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. He stressed the importance of evaluating the results of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

14. Mr. CHEEMA (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) recalled that UNDP had already recommended a fundamental rethinking of development issues - indeed, a revolution in thinking with respect to the participation of people and local authorities, the empowerment of women and economic growth, which should be seen not as an end in itself, but as a means of promoting equity, social development and environmental sustainability.

15. As part of the preparatory process for Habitat II, UNDP had organized an international colloquium of mayors and a series of regional preparatory meetings. It had also launched a series of publications on critical issues such as urban agriculture, gender and housing, South-South cooperation and ecotechnologies. Moreover, it had organized a round table on urbanization and globalization, having sponsored a comprehensive collection of studies on the issue.

16. During Habitat II, at both the NGO Forum and the official Conference, UNDP had organized a series of parallel events on urbanization in developing countries. Because its resources were limited, UNDP had to confine its activities to a few main priority areas in its follow-up to Habitat II:

(1) poverty alleviation through country-anchored programmes and the development of macroeconomic frameworks where economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability progressed together; (2) improvement of the quality of the urban and peri-urban environment through environmentally sound technologies, which, in turn, required partnerships among the public sector, the private sector and the scientific community; (3) improvement of the capacity of local governments through the decentralization of authority and resources; (4) provision of adequate shelter through access to land, credit and construction materials and through local- and community-level organization; and (5) improvement of telecommunications in poor regions of least developed countries, to give local populations access to information or distance education. Lastly, UNDP was committed to ensuring gender balance in its programmes and to removing barriers to the full participation of women.

17. With respect to cooperation, UNDP was fully committed to promoting the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Accordingly, through more than 130 field offices, it would provide support to Governments, non-governmental organizations and other partners. Coordination of the activities of United Nations agencies was fundamental. In that connection, the role of resident representatives was of paramount importance. Moreover, UNDP would strengthen its collaboration with United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements. Local authorities and cities' associations would also play a prominent role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities had been a landmark event. UNDP planned to strengthen its partnership with non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and would continue to promote technical cooperation among developing countries.

18. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements) said that he welcomed the technical and material support provided by UNDP, the awareness campaigns it conducted and, in particular, its contribution in terms of the Urban Management Programme and its role in the sphere of technical cooperation among developing countries. That support had made it possible, inter alia, to organize a round table at Habitat II on the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, which had led to a political consensus, and he hoped that such fruitful collaboration would continue.

19. Ms. DE LA BARRA (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the Fund's participation in Habitat II had arisen from the fact that the current urban crisis was a children's crisis. The majority of children in developing countries were poor, and the majority of the poor lived in urban areas. Unfortunately, disparities were intensifying and investment in infrastructure was declining in urban areas, creating appalling environmental and health conditions. Child mortality rates in shanty towns were nearly five times the rate for children living in more affluent areas, and the existence of street and working children bore witness to society's failure to achieve shared sustainable development.

20. UNICEF had focused its human settlements activities on urban basic services and the involvement of mayors and local authorities in defending children's rights and meeting their needs. Based on the lessons drawn from those

experiences, UNICEF had concentrated its activities, throughout the preparatory process for Habitat II and during the Conference itself, on putting children at the centre of the concerns of Habitat II, identifying poverty as the main cause of ill health in urban children, developing policies that led to a better distribution of the fruits of economic growth, reaffirming housing rights and defending the role of cities in guaranteeing the well-being of their inhabitants and not merely economic growth.

21. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by 187 countries to date, was a powerful tool for analysing the situation of children in urban areas and for developing programmes that would respond to their needs and respect their rights, which were too often denied to children living in slums and squatter settlements. In the context of Habitat II, UNICEF had launched the Child-Friendly Cities Network, which included United Nations agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, academicians and others, who, through a seminar and a workshop sponsored by UNICEF, had incorporated the commitments of the Convention into the global plan of action adopted at Habitat II, and had helped UNICEF to incorporate the Habitat Agenda into its programming process.

22. Habitat II had also led to the recognition that the well-being of children was a critical indicator of a healthy society. The Declaration of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities, and the global plan of action, must be translated into specific activities. The International Workshop on Africa's Urban Poor Child, which would be held in Accra, Ghana, in March 1997, with the support of UNICEF, should result in further progress by giving African mayors and local governments the opportunity to make commitments regarding poor children in the cities of Africa. UNICEF was convinced that placing children at the centre of the urban development strategy would make the world a better place for all.

23. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements) said that he welcomed the cooperation of UNICEF, particularly with respect to the development of a system of indicators and the Best Practices Initiative, and hoped that it would continue. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) looked forward to participating in the workshop to be held in Accra in 1997, and hoped that that event would strengthen its cooperation with mayors and local governments.

24. Mr. CHOUINARD (Canada) reaffirmed his delegation's wholehearted support for the full and gradual realization of the right to adequate housing for all and for the development of sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world, which was inseparable from the development of just, safe, inclusive and prosperous societies. Significant progress had been made at Habitat II in the areas of gender equality, women's participation in community life, good governance, particularly at the local level, the importance of population growth and movements in urban planning and management, and participatory decentralization.

25. Human settlements played an essential role in sustainable development and must be an integral component of policies and programmes developed at the local, national, regional and international levels. It was in cities, towns and

villages that progress in the areas of economic development, population growth, poverty reduction, environmental protection, gender equality and respect for human rights would be measured.

26. The notion of sustainable human settlements must therefore be integrated more systematically both at the national level and within the United Nations system; a dialogue must be established between civil society and its representatives, and cooperation among local Governments that had to resolve similar problems and between the various levels of government must be strengthened. Such a dialogue would lead to growing involvement in the development and implementation of programmes and policies pertaining to housing and human settlements. The development of healthy, safe, equitable and sustainable cities, towns and villages helped to strengthen global peace, stability, security and prosperity.

27. Canada's international cooperation activities would seek to contribute to the harmonious development of urban and rural areas and the creation of partnerships between cities and civil society in Canada, in developing countries and in countries in transition.

28. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) commended Canada's cooperation with cities, mayors and municipalities. Human settlements must work well in order to combat exclusion and defend the interests of women and children.

29. Mr. SINGH BARNALA (India) said that effective implementation of the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) would be the most meaningful tribute possible to those who had organized the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1976 in Vancouver. India had participated actively in the Istanbul Conference and in the preparations for it, and had set up a national steering committee, comprising three key groups that represented all the persons and organizations concerned, which had made an invaluable contribution. India had also worked actively to ensure that the role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements were strengthened in the follow-up process.

30. The interdependence of rural and urban areas could not be underestimated. Although sustainable development must be pursued in urban settlements, rural areas must also be developed and the needs of the rural population addressed. The housing policy adopted by India in 1994 acknowledged that shelter and development were mutually supportive. An integral part of the fight against poverty and efforts to generate employment was the construction of housing, especially in rural areas, where 75 per cent of the population lived. Provision had been made for direct intervention and financial support from the State, and efforts were under way to create an enabling environment. A national action plan had also been adopted for children directly affected by poor-quality housing. Other measures taken included the provision of additional developed land and adequate financial assistance, the promotion of energy-saving building materials and cost-effective construction technologies, the upgrading of unusable housing, special programmes for the disadvantaged and for women, programmes linking improved housing to the eradication of poverty, the support

for development of the informal sector, the introduction of land reform, and public and private-sector partnerships.

31. Integration, participation and decentralization were key elements of his Government's policy. However, improving human settlements was dependent on the economic situation; only sustained economic growth would provide the necessary resources for investments. The international community also had a role to play by providing financial resources and technology transfers. Today's cities were faced with a lack of financial resources and socio-economic and demographic pressures; the gap between rich and poor was widening, providing basic social services was increasingly difficult, health, environmental and security problems were getting worse and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption were becoming widespread.

32. It was therefore imperative that the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements should be strengthened, for it had a crucial role to play in implementing the decisions taken at Habitat II. It must assist countries in formulating policies which reflected the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and the Global Strategy for Shelter to the year 2000.

33. The CHAIRMAN noted that the question of increasing resources for the provision of basic social services was considered in the context of the 20/20 initiative.

34. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)) stressed that the dichotomy between urban settlements and rural areas had long been a problem; however, the United Nations, thanks in great part to India, had managed to attenuate that problem by approaching the question of human settlements as a whole. The effects of cities on their hinterlands was another point which should not be ignored.

35. Mr. AYALA (Uruguay) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Rio Group on implementation of the decisions taken at the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. That Conference had signalled the beginning of efforts that were of genuine importance for national and regional development, the functioning of human settlements worldwide and the fight against poverty and for social justice. The active participation by non-governmental organizations in Habitat II and in the formulation of development policies was noteworthy.

36. Parliamentarians were in an ideal position to act as mediators between the State and civil society. They were responsible not only for national legislation but also for approving State budgets. The need to create a special committee to study the question of human settlements throughout the continent had been brought to the attention of the Latin American Parliament. Uruguay was participating actively in the work of Global Parliamentarians on Habitat and had adopted housing legislation and policies that were in keeping with current thinking. Much remained to be done, however, in the areas of land-use planning and environmental protection.

37. Although the objective of Habitat II had been to develop the Habitat Agenda which made housing a human right, it was up to Governments to enact legislation in the area of human settlements.

38. With that in mind, his delegation was in favour of strengthening the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements as an independent body within the United Nations system.

39. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of Habitat II) said that he agreed that parliamentarians had a crucial role to play in the field of human settlements given that it was essential for the relevant institutions and legislation to be strengthened.

40. Mr. JALLOW (Gambia) said that the principal merit of Habitat II had been that it had given concrete expression to the international community's concerns regarding the environment, sustainable development, housing and the struggle against poverty. The implementation of the Global Plan of Action and the other commitments assumed at Istanbul would require concerted action and the collective resolve to promote human-oriented development throughout the world. Habitat II had been marked by an effort for such concerted action and by the sharing of new ideas stemming from all sectors of society.

41. Because of its lack of suitable shelter and shortcomings in human settlements, which were causing serious sanitation, public-safety and population problems, Africa had elaborated its own programme of action in the wake of the Conference. The Gambia, in particular, was determined to realize the Istanbul goals both to improve the quality of life of its people and give it back its dignity. In the context of its efforts to develop human resources and improve rural and urban settlements, the Government had opted for a community-based participatory approach.

42. Two major principles should be observed with a view to ensuring the more effective implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action: first, the planning process should be restructured in order to make it dynamic, innovative, multisectoral, multidisciplinary, responsive, realistic and, above all, participatory; and secondly, new resources must be allocated to implementing the outcome of the Conference. Such implementation had already benefited from the assistance of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, the World Bank, UNDP and the donor community, and South-South and North-South cooperation would have a crucial role to play.

43. The mandate of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements should be renewed, and it should be provided with the organizational and technical capacities that would allow it fully to perform its functions as a focal point and a provider of support services to governments and local authorities.

44. The goals of the Conference could be achieved within the time-frame envisaged if the international community met its commitment to implement the Plan of Action in a concerted manner, thus inaugurating a new era of progress for mankind.

45. Mrs. BENITEZ (Philippines) said that Habitat II had indeed been a "partnership conference" because of the important contributions made by the various components of civil society such as local authorities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and community-based associations. It had had a new and particularly fruitful feature, namely the "best practices" initiative, which had made it possible to present diverse examples of successful collaboration between various partners with a view to improving the living environment. The Philippines, which had been involved in the work of the United Nations in human settlements since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, felt that the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda had only marked the beginning of the more difficult task of translating commitment to sustainable human settlements into operational terms.

46. Given that each country was responsible for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda at the national level, the Philippines had elaborated a national plan of action that dovetailed with all other national economic and social development plans, including programmes for the eradication of poverty, for the environment, for women and for children, with a view to improving the quality of life of the rural and urban population. The plan outlined the complementary roles of the Government, local authorities and the private sector. The various housing programmes involved all sectors of civil life, including relevant non-governmental organizations providing technical support and financing.

47. Needless to say, the achievement of the goals of the Habitat Agenda, particularly in the developing countries, would certainly be facilitated by an enabling international economic environment. There was a need for constructive action on financing for development, international trade, external debt, and technology transfer. The strengthening of technical cooperation through the establishment of accessible global information networks on human settlements, specifically the dissemination of information on the "best practices", should also be pursued. The United Nations, in particular the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), and the Bretton Woods institutions, the regional banks and the specialized agencies had a crucial role to play. The resources already allocated by the World Bank to urban programmes and the launching of the Project Development Facility by UNDP and of the Urban Management Programme of UNDP, the World Bank and Habitat were to be commended. Those initiatives must, however, be extended to rural areas, and the global partnership must be sustained for the benefit of all people, especially the poor and underprivileged, women and children and migrants.

48. Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) said that the issue of human settlements was of concern to the entire international community and that it was incumbent on all States to do what was necessary to preserve the global environment.

49. At Habitat II, his delegation had raised the problems caused by 17 years of warfare in Lebanon and those that persisted in the south of the country and in the western Bekaa, the areas occupied by Israel since 1978.

50. In addition to the exodus from the countryside and chaotic urbanization, problems common to all developing countries, Lebanon encountered other difficulties: the destruction of housing and infrastructure; the collapse of economic and cultural institutions; the displacement of more than

100,000 families; an unbalanced geographical distribution of the population; a rise in unemployment; the devastation of arable land; stagnation in industry, tourism and commerce; frequent human rights violations; a breakdown of social and moral values; growing drug use; and increasing juvenile crime.

51. In order to remedy that situation, the Lebanese Government had made the reconstruction of the country its major goal. In order to accomplish that, it had elaborated ambitious programmes costing some 27 billion dollars to be financed by Lebanon, friendly countries, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, including UNDP, UNESCO and the Bretton Woods institutions. Two of those programmes, which had been presented at the Istanbul Conference, concerned the restoration of the central commercial district of Beirut and the reconstruction of housing and villages with a view to the return of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. In that connection, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1996/32, had appealed to all Member States and all organizations of the United Nations system to intensify their efforts with a view to considering an increase in all forms of support for the reconstruction and development of Lebanon.

52. Lebanon was also enduring Israel's occupation of the western Bekaa and the southern part of the country. The occupation, which was accompanied by acts of terrorism, abduction and expropriation, had made it impossible to implement the principles adopted in Istanbul. Given that the problem would finally be resolved only with the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), Lebanon urged the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to comply with that resolution.

53. Mr. N'DOW (Secretary-General of Habitat) said that Lebanon had offered participants in Habitat II the particularly edifying example of a country that had been devastated by war and had been able to launch a successful reconstruction project of formidable scope.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.